

There's a meeting to discuss this in my flat next Saturday at 1'0 clock. Not free uni. Just parole. Peter.

## ESSAY

# The Greening of Italy

Last June's election brought a new force into the Italian political arena — the Greens. TONI NEGRI argues that the Green movement in Italy may turn out to be much more than a replica of its counterparts elsewhere in Europe

TWO AND A HALF per cent of the electorate, 13 deputies and two senators — the results delivered by the Italian Greens at their first ever election last June are far from negligible. Especially if we bear in mind that, in the urban centres of northern and central Italy, the Green vote has invariably gone above 4 per cent, while some local results, in Venice and Trento, have risen to 7 per cent and more — and that this latter figure is the same as the overall Green vote in the 18-25 age group.

It is also important to remember that many other electoral lists (Christian Democrats, Communists, Republicans, Radicals, etc.) included candidates who took up ecological issues, a fact that's made it harder to pinpoint an independent Green presence as a new element in the political arena. Indeed, the very intensity of attempts by other parties to contain its impact emphasises the significance of the Green Party's successes. I would argue that it suggests an irreversible progress; it certainly shows the breadth of potential for further growth.

Of all the countries in Europe, Italy is the one whose natural and artistic heritage has suffered most, squandered and damaged by chronic mismanagement, corrupt politicians and the greed of private citizens. Capitalist enterprise has completed the long trail of destruction — *quod non fecerunt barbari, fecerunt Barbari*\*. So great has the damage been to our natural and cultural environment that public anxiety about the Chernobyl cloud quickly turned to wide-ranging protest about the multiple character of the disaster. There was a rapid public recognition of how the myriad problems of everyday ecology, of nuclear power and nuclear armaments, of industrial pollution and the destruction of nature and art, could no longer be seen as separate issues — all were now part of the 'ecology question'.

This new concern largely explains the Greens' success. But it's not the only reason for it, and we should also look at more particular, subjective determinants. In the vocabulary of Italian politics, the Green movement could be described as 'transversal' and 'autonomous'. Transversal in the sense that it cuts across all the middle and lower sections of society; autonomous in that it rejects anything resembling a bureaucratic or institutional structure.

There are those who say that a certain

regionalism (so traditional in Italy), briefly displaced by Chernobyl, will soon return, proving that the national unity achieved by the Greens was merely an emotional response. In reality, however, the Greens demonstrate a substantial degree of ideological unity (a residue of the German influence and, even more, of the political experience of the Italian protest movements of the '70s). And, more importantly, they are beginning to reflect quite homogenous social groups and class stratifications, ones that have yet to be translated into institutional terms. Nothing could be further from the truth than the claim that the Greens draw in sections of society so diverse and mutually contradictory that any coalition so formed is inevitably precarious.

## The Italian way

To clarify, let's compare the Italian Greens with other European ecology movements. They are far less sectarian than the French movement was in its heyday (the anti-nuclear struggles of the mid-'70s); because of their 'transversality' the Italian Greens include many different tendencies and discourses, which stops any single-issue slogans, objectives or campaigns from holding the platform. From the political point of view, this excludes denigration and limits opportunities for sectarian manipulation. Its general character as a political movement makes it unlikely to be assimilated by partial and exclusive alternatives, or to be swept up in minority, utopian stances. In short, in no way does it lay itself open to the trap of 'fundamentalism'.

The Italian movement is much less party oriented, formal and bureaucratic than its German counterpart. Of course it's early days yet,

and there's no guarantee that it won't eventually harden out or be dragged through ill-judged expediency into verticalising its own structure — the sort of thing that has happened wherever 'realistic' priorities have been imposed. But it's still unlikely, at least in the medium-term, since the movement is unequivocally extra-parliamentary, anti-bureaucratic and autonomous.

In particular, the Greens can be seen to connect with that new, productive, third sector of the economy, made up of a variety of intellectual and information workers, often based in small production units. In post-industrial society, this sector is becoming increasingly central. The fact that it has not shared the aims of capitalist development has kept this grouping of new subjectivities, wrought from new needs, outside most institutional and political bodies; the Green movement challenges this exclusion.

It's no accident that — contrary to all predictions — the Green votes haven't come from the Communist Party (PCI), but instead from within grass-roots organisations, especially those active in this productive third sector. Nor is it by chance that the Greens also have a strong base among young, female and metropolitan voters. The Green party is organised in social sectors that, for want of representation within existing structures, are ready for radical protest. Where in the past they might have been drawn towards the Communist camp, today they've become resistant to the corporatism of the trade unions, the PCI and indeed the left in general.

Thus the Green vote shows the first signs of a new split in Italian society. It has begun to express the social shifts produced by intense modernisation: a new kind of dispersed,

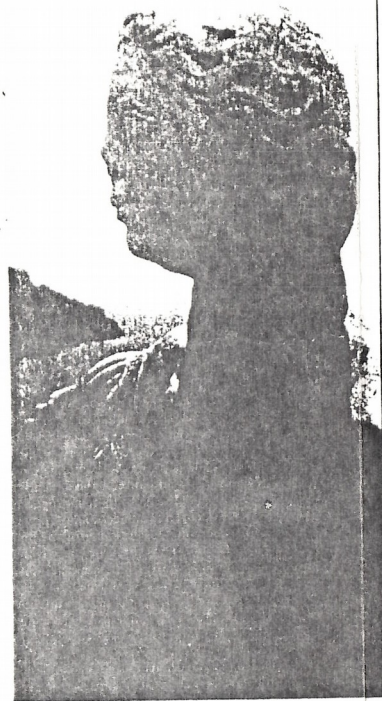
Autonomist movement by association with the Red Brigades. Negri was one of many intellectuals arrested in 1979 and held in preventive detention for four years before coming to trial. In his case, the charges were frequently changed: masterminding the Moro kidnap (dropped), armed insurrection (dropped), finally complicity in two murders. The 'evidence' for this last charge was supplied by a notorious 'pentiti' (repentant), Carlo Fioroni. Fioroni had himself already been sentenced for murder, but in return for his services he was given a passport and new identity and allowed to leave the country. Negri's lawyers were not allowed to question him; his own lawyer said his statements had been false. Nonetheless, Negri was convicted and given 30 years; similarly stiff sentences, with similar lack of evidence, were given to many others. But Negri — who had been briefly freed on being elected MP for the Radicals — had already fled to France, where he still lives. K. S. Karol, formerly NS French correspondent, now a writer for *Nouvel Observateur*, has compared the plight of Negri and the hundreds of Italians still in jail for 'political crimes' to that of the Soviet dissidents.

TONI NEGRI remains one of the most famous figures from Italy's turbulent social movements of the '70s for two reasons. First because, as a professor at Padua, philosopher and political theorist, his books on the transformation of Italy's economy and class structure have been extremely influential; second because of the scandal surrounding his arrest, trial and present exile, as part of the 'criminalisation' of the



Toni Negri: Autonomist in exile

\* What the barbarians didn't do, the Barbarians did — the epicurean refers to the wealthy Barbarian families of Florence, famous for their depictions and in this case for allowing the presence of the Barbarians to be melted down for gain in 1625.



Art and nature in peril on the Gulf of Salerno

productive, increasingly mobile labour force; a more flexible social organisation of the working day and freer mechanisms for reproducing the labour force; an interpenetration of the production and distribution of goods; and a resulting socialisation of productive subjects. While the factory permeates society, throughout society new liberalising tendencies and the antagonisms they face become clear.

It is true that other forces, like the Socialists (PSI) or Liberal-Radicals, are better placed than the PCI to follow the Greens on to this liberalising social terrain. But their advantageous position may not make much difference. Socialists and Radicals are certainly free of the corporate fetters that tie the PCI, on the other hand they are restricted by equally binding political ties like the NATO commitment, and by an anticapitalism that is, to say the least, rather timid. Their opposition to nuclear power can only be moderate in the extreme, and it's hard to see how they can make inroads into the peace movement. In the

next electoral confrontation it looks likely that the Greens will rob the PSI and the Radicals of at least as many votes in tertiary social sectors as they will take from the PCI in the traditional enclaves of the working class.

Given this scenario, why has the Green movement only now become a parliamentary force to be reckoned with? To answer the question we need to recall the remarkable circumstances in which the recent electoral campaign took place. The June election was precipitated by the Christian Democrats' refusal to continue with a coalition government under a Socialist leadership. In effect, the Christian Democrats gave notice that if the Socialist leadership were to continue it would mean the end of the constitutional accord on which Italy's political and parliamentary life has rested since the early '50s. This accord anticipated a political system built on a Catholic party majority, with a minority opposition represented by the PCI. Such a constitutional model, extremely common in western democracies, is usually referred to as 'bipartism' — but in Italy's case the bipartism was 'imperfect', a euphemism meaning that the majority should always stay a majority and the minority stay a minority. There can be no changing places, because the material and historical conditions that gave rise to the accord don't allow it.

## Hand in glove

Thus every attempt to alter the majorities and make changes in the political system was repressed by the combined forces of the ruling class — the Christian Democrats, of course, but with them (and this is where 'imperfect' bipartism could also be called 'perverse') the PCI. The PCI is guaranteed a monopoly of opposition and has freely played its part in immobilising the constitutional and democratic life of the country. The moment when the repression of forces outside this 'compromised history' was carried out with the most brutal determination was precisely under the governments of the 'historic compromise', in the second half of the '70s. During this period, every social force that tried to break the rigidity of the constitutional block and organise alternatives was hit hard. Hand in glove with terrorist provocations, repression struck directly at the grass-roots movements. But the state didn't shrink either from a little brush with the PSI, along with any other political elements that would no longer tolerate the old institutional subordination.

It was only during the legislature of 1983-87, with the *anni di piombo* (literally, 'years of lead' — a common phrase for the violence of the '70s) finally over, that the PSI played its card and tried, albeit within the constitutional context, to wrench away the majority, and with it political hegemony, from the Christian Democrats, thereby destroying the blocking formation of the political system that 'imperfect bipartism' required and had imposed. The June '87 election represents a local point in this scenario. It is the Greens who have made the most of the opening up of political space.

It seems to me that the effects of this emergence are already rather interesting. First, it's significant that a series of new social movements should take this opportunity to come out of the margins and find political expression. It is a process that particularly relates to those levels of the productive third sector on which the recent Italian industrial boom was based — across a spread of industries that are all heavily automated: the raw material here is computer data and intellectual

labour is the first step in production. This new labour force, refusing to accept computerisation as an extension of Taylorism — as a new form of control and regimentation — sees the Greens as an alternative direction.

What should also be stressed is that with the Greens — along with the critique of bureaucracy — there's a renewed need for militant action and for that idea of autonomy according to which each demand, be it economic, social or political, has to find the strength to be asserted independently of those in power and their refusals or compromises. Social autonomy should always be expressed as counter-power — all the more so in ecological issues where often the alternative is between the values of life and death.

I believe the Italian Greens do more than shape a project for the future, they also re-tie the thread of memory. For the repression of the late '70s had blanked out the tradition of social and working class struggle which developed without a break from the start of the '60s. And it had banished from public life and buried under an avalanche of prison sentences all those groups of workers and intellectuals who had provided political continuity throughout that period. More than 20,000 people were imprisoned for political 'crimes' at the end of the '70s. An entire generation of militants was silenced and with them a rich tradition of theory and political organisation; in their place came the attempt to give currency to the ideology of *pentimento* ('repentance') — as in the notorious practice of 'repentant' terrorists' clearing themselves by supplying names of other, supposed, criminals) and to lend authority to a breed of intellectuals who themselves had recanted. It was the triumph of a kind of postmodernism (the end of history); more seriously, it was the triumph of a brutal free market economy. To counter it there was now only a frayed and formless memory, a hostage to terrorism, unable to handle reality.

Now the situation is changing. The great paradox of the Greens lies in the fact that, while their successful organisation undoubtedly rested on their departure from the recent memory of political struggles, at the same time they gathered around their emergence the imaginary sense of past struggles, expressing the continuity of the old goals of radical social transformation. This has an objective value in the sense that, whether tacitly or, at times, noisily, there are more and more letting ideological options in the Greens' programme and mode of organisation, and from this perspective there is a fundamental role for an analysis of the crisis of capitalism and the perception of its vast ecological costs.

But it is mostly from a subjective perspective that memory re-emerges. When, through militancy, social subjects succeed in recognising themselves, albeit now living out totally altered class positions, then the collective memory of struggle, of political organisation and of aims becomes renewed and confirmed, and produces new, constructive initiatives. What memory offers to the victims of capitalist development's new contradictions is a guiding thread that is always there; often it's an arsenal to be put to use, sometimes (and between the red and green this is the case) a whole series of past experiences of rebellion that are still alive, still open to hope.

Revolution Retrieved, a collection of Negri's writings on Marx, Keynes, capitalist crisis and new social subjects is about to be published by Red Notes. Details from them at BPS, 2a St Paul's Rd, London N1